



A LETTER

ON THE

Disgraceful Riot in the Catholic Church in Prescott,

ON

SUNDAY, Sept, 8th 1867.

WITH A REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC CAREER

OF THE

REV. E. P. ROCHE, P. P. OF PRESCOTT,

BY

J. GRAY, Student at Law, Prescott, Ontario.

OGDENSBURGH, N. Y.

1867

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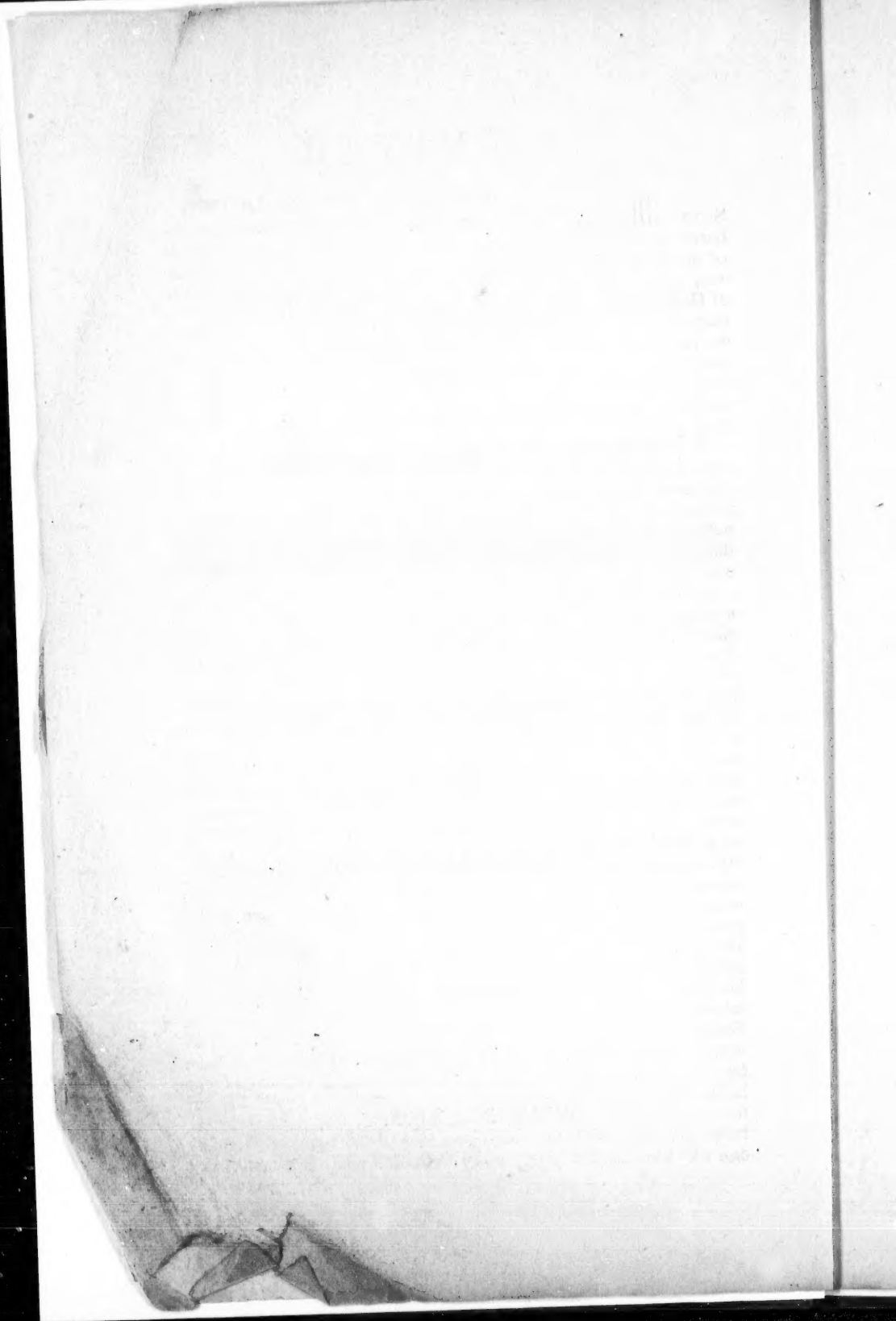
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OGDENSBURGH, N.Y., Oct. 1st, 1867.

SUNDAY, the eight day of September, 1867, will long be remembered by the inhabitants of Prescott, and especially the Catholics of this town, as one on which one of the most disgraceful, scandalous, may we add sacrilegious, riots, which ever desecrated the house of God, occurred in the Roman Catholic Church in Prescott. We purpose herein to review the cause of so unusual an occurrence; we purpose to give an exposé of the reasons which influenced the congregation; we purpose to narrate without fear, favour or malice, the wrongs of the Catholics of this Mission, and explain the almost universal, yet just indignation, of the Catholics of Prescott against their pastor.

In so doing we assure our readers in advance, that we admit and respect the principle, that private character is something which every gentleman should consider sacred, and especially *one who is the depository of man's imperfections*! When a man, however, assumes a public position, his acts are liable to enlightened public criticism; but defamation of private character is always the criterion of a blackguard and a coward.

In our personal references we will confine ourselves to the public acts and dictions of him whom we consider as immediately responsible for the lamentable scene which we will attempt to portray. Possibly in so doing we may, figuratively speaking, be obliged to place the culprit in the *Triangles*. We may be forced to let the Cats descend on his blistering back; we may deem it judicious to order a shower bath to cool and subject his torrid cranium; we may prescribe a dark cell wherein to compose his wandering and excited imagination wherein by calm reflection and free from public indignation he may feel the odour of his nasty public dictions, and cry out in the sincerity of a truly contrite heart, "peccavi, peccavi, miserere me Domine;" but once more we reiterate our assurance that we write with no sentiments of hatred or ill will, but with feelings of deep sympathy and condolence; we write in obedience to public opinion which demands such an exposition of this defamer of private character; we write and strike only on the defensive, and whilst we have a free press we will not hesitate to wield our quill in defence of public good and private character. And we feel assured in this instance by bringing Father Roche before the bar of public opinion, by exposing his public career to the gaze of an indignant public, we will teach a salutary lesson to others of his stamp, and convince the venerable Bishop of this Diocese that Prescott has too long been saddled with a Pastor most objectionable to his hearers and whose usefulness has long since ceased; who has called the most exemplary of our ladies sluts and swine; who has assailed the most honorable of our fellow townsmen with Five Point epithets, and dubbed infant babes as *brats*, within the sacred precincts of the house of God, by one who has attacked nearly every Catholic Family in Prescott and

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its environs, and who ever forgetful of the noble injunction of the Roman bard, "Nil nisi bonum de Mortuis." has *assailed* the dead bones of our venerable departed and *held them up* to the scorn of an *indignant* congregation in the presence of weeping friends and relations; and on one occasion in particular, assuming the very attributes of the Divinity, he told one of the most exemplary Catholic families in Canada that the soul of their dead brother was burning in Purgatory for their sins. "Judge not lest ye be judged," will be the only comment we will make on so unparalled an utterance. To our many Catholic friends we would say, that no person could entertain more respect for the sacred dignity of a Priest, no person be more sensible of the reverence due to one than the writer; but this respect, this reverence, should never dwindle into a superstitious awe for the individual who so far forgets his sacred vocation, as to violate everything that is dignified in chivalrous humanity, as to outrage every fine sentiment of the human breast, and crucify as it were the most delicate passions and affections of the human heart, and we remind our readers that "from him to whom much is given much shall be required," and consequently the more sacred the character the more sacred should be the example; and when the latter becomes revolting the more responsible must be the culprit. Judas Iscariot was one of the chosen of Christ, yet the Saviour of mankind told him it were better for him he were never born!!

To enter on our task. Father Roche has now officiated as P. P. in Prescott some twenty-three years; he has presided over one of the most wealthy, intelligent and respectable congregations in Upper Canada, who not only supplied all his pecuniary necessities, but bestowed on him large sums of money, which he has invested in mortgages and other securities in the Province. He is a curly head, good looking, dressy, dashy individual; sports a black thorn, seldom or never wears his sutan in public, and patronizes horse races, theatres, circuses, nigger shows, &c. A stranger would take him more for a Jockey than a Clergyman; as a scholar he is very superficial, he is well adapted to play the part of a *demagogue* among an *extreme ignorant community*; but intelligence easily penetrates his shallowness; his sermons are very high falutin and windy, contains very little substance, and after an effort of three-quarters of an hour, seven-eighths of his hearers would know very little of what he had been talking about. With this brief sketch of the notorious individual in question, we will now come to the immediate subject of our letter. We accuse Father Roche of having attacked or insulted almost every Catholic family in Prescott. We accuse him of having *assailed* the dead bones of our venerable departed, and we will now lance the ulcer of his public career and place its disgusting core before an indignant public gaze; we will rehearse some of his base attacks on private character, which will explain, justify and account for the almost universal abhorrence in which he is held by his hearers, and show why, after so long a career, which should have endeared him to his

congregation, a respectful though firm demand is about being made for his removal.

The Morans, the Sweeneys, the Carberys, the Whites, the Mooneys, the Murphys, the McCreas, the Bucklys, the McGannons, the Scotts, the Messrs. Savage, Kavanagh, Keilty, O'Sullivan, Cowan, McGruory Dissett, Portrie, and many young ladies whose names we forbear to mention; Father McKay, the venerable sisters of Notre Dame at Ogdensburg, the Hon. John S. McDonald, among Catholics are some of the families and persons whom he has more or less shamefully abused in his Church from the altar, platform or the pulpit. During the hours of divine service he has stigmatized his congregation in the presence of strangers as a filthy set; within the same sacred precincts he has called two of the most exemplary young ladies in Prescott *DIRTY SLUTS*, another a *FILTHY SWINE*! Would you not be justified, Mr. T. Tracy, if you have a spark of noble feeling in your breast, if you have a courageous soul hesitate no longer to horsewhip in the public streets the base defamer of your esteemed sisters, or retain Mr. Fraser or Richards to bring him before a judge and jury where his deserts may be meted out to him. Mr. J. Buckley will you hesitate any longer to apply a green beach to the back of the man who calumniated your venerable father whilst living and cast reflections on his cherished memory when dead? Let no vague terrors deter either of you from a task which filial affection must stimulate you to perform! Mr. Moran, *your sister, mother, brother, have been shamefully vilified whilst living, one of them judged by Father Roche whilst dead*; what course will you pursue? To many other families we might likewise appeal; the fond mother whose *infant babe* he branded as *brat in the church*, we might invoke to castigate the slanderer of her offspring; of *Father McKay*, whom he called a *miserable mendicant*, we might ask to demand an apology. To the venerable sisters of Notre Dame we might suggest their right and duty to demand a retraction of the slanders poured out against them: but the public is cognizant of these and many other outrages of which Father Roche has been guilty, and we stay here for the present and come to the more immediate subject of our letter—the riot in the church—remarked, *en passant*, that during the long career of defamation of private character which the Catholics of Prescott submitted to from Father Roche, they endeavored by all possible means to cultivate friendly relations with him and often gratified many of his whims much against their inclinations.

During the late elections, certainly through no personal motives, but through sincere political convictions, the Catholics of Prescott allied themselves with the reform party. We say without personal motives, for no more estimable gentlemen than the conservative candidates, Messrs. Shanly & Clarke, could be found. This alliance caused Father Roche's ire and he endeavored by violent harangues in his church to induce his congregation to renounce the principles they espoused. His hearers became gradually more and more disgusted

with his conduct and especially recognized the insincerity of his assertions "that the interest of the Catholics of this section were more secure in the hands of Macneil Clarke than in those of his estimable Catholic opponent John McCarthy." The Sunday previous to the riot Father Roche threatened his hearers with an electioneer harangue in favour of Messrs. Shanly and Clarke, when the great majority of them stood up and walked out of the church. At the nomination he, in our opinion, almost originated a riot, and we trust the scathing repartee of Mr. C. F. Fraser, that leading and sound exponent of Catholic opinion will prove useful to his reverence. During the entire election Father Roche might be seen forgetful of his sacred character, descending into the political cock pit, making an electioneer drummer of himself, driving from one end of the riding to the other, imploring his co-religionists for God sake to vote for Messrs. Shanly and Clarke! On the Sunday in question the people hoped that, as his ambition was realized, his appetite for personal abuse would be satiated. But ere divine service was over, shielding himself under the protection of his vestments, he poured out a volley of abuse at the congregation in general, and then veered around to his disgusting personalities. The writer hereof was the first victim aimed at, and whilst the foolish diatribes of abuse were confined to himself he treated them with silent contempt. Irritated possibly at the indifference of the writer to his foolish remarks, he began to trespass on more dangerous grounds; he began to hold up the dying remains of the writer's afflicted brother for the scorn of his hearers, outraging every generous impulse of his weeping mother, breaking the very spring of everything that was dear and beloved in her breast; agonizing every cord in her heart by some, so despicable, so cowardly an allusion to her dying son. The writer's brother was a young gentleman who had completed his collegiate course; he was universally esteemed by all his acquaintances and respected for his talents and character; he entered the Jesuit novitiate, preparatory to making a profession of a religious life, when, by an accident which dislocated his spine, he was forever prostrated both physically and mentally, and he was placed in the Provincial Asylum for treatment under the fostering care of Dr. Workman. It was this dying remnant of afflicted mortality with whom there was so general a sympathy that Father Roche was beastly enough to allude to, when the writer advanced up the aisle of the church and respectfully remarked, "Father Roche I must protest against so vile an attack on "my dear, dying brother; attack me if you can, but if you dare asperse "his memory I shall vindicate his character." Enraged at this request Father Roche shouted "put the boy out." Put me out! rejoined the writer, there is not one in the church who would do so. I respect your sacred dignity as a Priest and the sacred place we are in, but you force me to appeal to this congregation to say whether you have not scandalized them by your conduct and disgraced the position you should honour. You have insulted and abused nearly every Catholic family in Prescott, and I appeal to this congregation to shew

their universal abhorrence for your career in Prescott by standing up and leaving the church. Father Roche in a tremulous voice continued—"is there a man to put him out?" Not one! Is there a soldier to put him out? There was too much chivalry in their hearts to obey the coward's appeal. Lt. Donnevane said he would have marched the troops out had he been present. An old simple man now approached the writer, when a general uprising of the congregation surrounded him. Great excitement began to be manifested. Some one thousand men, women and children, were fainting, weeping, screaming and jumping out of the windows; one woman exclaimed, "let us leave the church and let Father Roche talk to the four walls." FATHER ROCHE, LIKE THE ISHMALITE, HAD HIS HANDS RAISED AGAINST EVERY MAN AND EVERY MAN'S HAND WAS RAISED AGAINST HIM!

"The tyrant now
Trusts not to man; nightly within his chamber
The Blood Hounds guard his couch, the only friends,
He now dare trust."

He assured his hearers that he was calm and composed; the ignominy of his position, no doubt, began to make him assistant of the disgust in which he was held. *Not a friend, not an assistant to obey his orders, except old Martin Band his hired man, whom he almost pounded to death last winter.* The latter, we believe, drew the blood of one of the congregation, when he was collared by some of the crowd and pitched out of the church. For this sacrilege we leave the public to judge who is responsible; one thousand witnesses will endorse the strict accuracy of our statements! It beggars all description to portray a large congregation during the sacred hours of Divine service in so irresistible a position, but from recitals above made an impartial public will conclude that this was a time when patience cease to be a virtue, when indignation against a monstrous career could not be restrained, and the writer, as well as the congregation, cannot in reality be responsible for any imperfections in their conduct, as the cup of their indignation was over-flown, and the natural was the law which governed their action. The writer, accompanied by his mother, quietly left the church when Father Roche hypocritically remarked, "oh how I sympathize with that boy's mother's feelings!" The congregation left the church; Prescott was scandalized by Father Roche's conduct; groups of people were seen all day in the street discussing the event. In justification of our conduct we may state that we have been personally waited on by almost every Catholic in Prescott and received an expression of thanks and approbation for the course we adopted.

In conclusion we beg to remind Father Roche that he is the last man who should make an unfavorable allusion to any person's brother. The dying scenes in a New Orleans.....of a certain individual ought to make him very cautious and delicate on such a subject. (We do not allude to the elder brother of F. R. known in Tipperary as "*Tiger Roche*.")

In justice to ourselves we must add a few remarks to this letter. Father Roche speaks a good deal about the writer's bad English, and disturbed intellect. If we remember rightly Father Roche was told some twelve years ago, through the columns of the press, by an M. P. P., that a hemp jacket was his best protector; and that his productions were not worthy of an infant in his teens. In our opinion he always makes a blunderbus of himself when he appears in the press, and any urchin at Larabie's school house might laugh at his composition. We think both he and the public will understand our English in this letter, bad as it may appear; and the public we think will award us a sounder intellect than that of our traducer.

As regards the assertions in the *Argus*,—that a plan was formed to get up a riot in the church on the Sunday in question, that the writer ever attacked Father Roche in the press or the streets, that the writer's brother was not alluded to on the Sunday in question, that the writer was expelled from the church on refusing to leave,—we brand the writer in the *Argus* as a liar, a sneak and a coward. We challenge him if he dare to come forth and unmask himself, we brand each and every of his assertions as a wilful lie, and can only think they were circulated in order to try and allay the indignation against Father Roche which is spreading on all sides. This edition of the *Argus* was not circulated in Prescott where its false contents were known. As regards the references of the *Argus* to Father Roche's loyalty: to the knowledge of the writer he coarsely abused at one time the boys on his altar for stopping from school to go to the procession on Her Majesty's birth day, and forbade them to do so; and when all the British Empire was weeping at the untimely death of the lamented Prince Consort, he held him up before his congregation as a monster who was judged before his God!! When the cabbage garden rebel, Smith O'Brien, came to Prescott, he gave him a public reception, and if we mistake not kissed his hand and said he honoured him for the love he bore to his country. We trust in the future, during Father Roche's stay among us, no decent lady or gentleman who reveres loyalty! the sacredness of private character! will be seen walking on the same side of the street with him. Let him continue to sneak through the back streets and only show himself like the owls when the dead of night may shield him from public recognition, and may he! Pious Anchorite, always continue to have Baltimore bivalors and salt water salmon to help him through the penitential fast days. We have only fired a little pepper and salt in this letter, No. 1. We hope we will not be obliged to appear again, for then we will be forced to discharge our grape and cannister. With the exception of an Ottawa correspondence, it is our first appearance in press. We have only now appeared at the most pressing solicitations of many friends and we think we have only discharged a public duty in so doing. In conclusion we will rehearse to the Rev. Father Roche what my Lord Bishop Farrell had occasion to tell him, "Go, sir, and learn how to behave yourself."

JOHN GRAY.

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GRAY.